

**THE BATTALION XO's EVOLVING ROLE  
DURING CONTINUOUS COMBAT OPERATIONS:  
CYBERNETIC FIX OR COMMAND BACK UP?**

**A Monograph**

**by**

**Major Albert P. Lawson**

**Infantry**

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<p>This monograph reviews the doctrinal duties of the maneuver battalion executive officer (XO) from World War I to the present. The role of the XO changed over time with different emphasis and priorities in respective eras.</p> <p>The purpose of this monograph is to focus attention on the XO during the late 1980s. The conduct of successful combat operations at battalion level required timely action by the XO. Yet, a detailed picture of how his complex duties interact is not available. Recent training experience resurrects the chief of staff role with additional combat service support (CSS) responsibilities and the second in command (2IC) responsibility.</p> <p>Inconsistent priorities for the XO create a combination of missions critical to the battalion but difficult, if not impossible, to execute (con'ted on back)</p>					
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Synchronization

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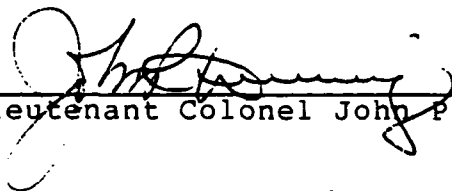


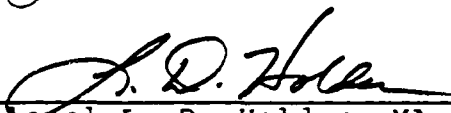
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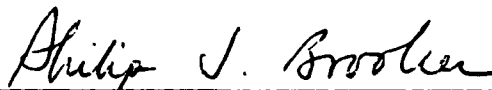
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## ABSTRACT

THE TASK FORCE XO'S EXPANDING ROLE DURING CONTINUOUS COMBAT OPERATIONS: CYBERNETIC FIX OR COMMAND BACK UP by MAJ Albert P. Lawson, USA, 53 pages.

This monograph reviews the doctrinal duties of the maneuver battalion Executive Officer (XO) from World War I to the present. The role of the XO changed over time with different emphasis and priorities in respective eras.

The purpose of this monograph is to focus attention on the XO during the late 1980s. The conduct of successful combat operations at battalion level requires timely action by the XO. Yet, a detailed picture of how his complex duties interact is not available. Recent training experience resurrects the chief of staff role with additional Combat Service Support (CSS) responsibilities and the second in command (2IC) responsibility.

Inconsistent priorities for the XO create a combination of missions critical to the battalion but difficult, if not impossible, to execute simultaneously. A look at this predicament is warranted. The XO requires detailed analysis by the Army or the smallest staff organization may find itself incapable of synchronizing the actions required for success in combat. (C) 1987

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Mechanized infantry and tank battalion task forces are major elements in the U.S. Army's application of AirLand Battle. "The battalion is the lowest echelon at which firepower, maneuver, intelligence and support are combined under a single commander."<sup>1</sup> As a direct result the battalion "is the lowest tactical echelon with a staff."<sup>2</sup> The staff is there to support the commander in the achievement of combat missions. It is essential for the commander to rely on his staff.

The maneuver battalion commander has a challenge with span of control. He has an Executive Officer (XO) to assist him with this mission. "The XO is the principal assistant to the battalion commander."<sup>3</sup> In maneuver battalions, the XO helps the commander prepare, conduct, and recover from combat operations.

The two historical tasks for the XO are chief of staff and second in command (2IC). A 1960 version of the SOFM 101-5, Staff Officer Field Manual, said, "the XO, performs functions generally similar to those of a chief of staff. In addition, he may be the second in command."<sup>4</sup> Yet, what the XO is, what he does, and where he does it fades in and out of focus over the past ten years. Current doctrinal and professional literature seems conflicting, confusing, and even exploratory in techniques and justification.



The XO role and the descriptive terms applied are evolving with new meaning and complexity. Issues continue to surface as AirLand Battle doctrine and J series force structure collide with the application of major training exercises, training, and National Training Center (NTC) experience. Tracking the XO role over time reflects the chief of staff and 2IC roles changing in emphasis, importance, and direction.

How the XO fits in the heavy maneuver battalion of the late 1980s requires analysis. "Command style is a very personal thing"<sup>5</sup> and a battalion will organize based on the commander's preferences. However, doctrinal manuals and published Army guidance are the basis of maneuver battalion organization and operation. A perspective on how the XO obtained the current doctrinal image provides some valuable insights.

This monograph looks at doctrinal duties of the XO over time. The absence of XO mention may reflect as important a message as a clear description. This monograph concentrates on the 1970s and 1980s as the period of change. The SOFM 101-5/FM 101-5, Staff Officers Field Manual, provides a vehicle for a historical review from World War I to the present. The historical background establishes a doctrinal orientation and a sense of consistency.

### Assumptions

The critical assumptions underlying this monograph are:

1. Army policy reflects the link between doctrine and field experience and is reflected in Army policy over time.
2. The XO is a key figure in the maneuver battalion during training and combat.
3. Peacetime training experience influences the development of doctrine as the Army endeavors to "train as you intend to fight."<sup>6</sup>

### II. BACKGROUND - XO EVOLUTION

The Army Expeditionary Force (AEF) during World War I applied the French model of the general staff. General Pershing was the force behind the organization and structure of the American staff. His decisions established the precedent for the current U.S. Army staff system. "As currently organized, the general staff is the product of many centuries of military evolution. It reflects the influence of the French staff system with minor British and Prussian characteristics."<sup>7</sup>

The battalion, as the lowest unit to have a staff, has always been in the Staff Officer Field Manual- Staff Organization and Procedures now known as FM 101-5, Staff Organization and Operations. These manuals contain a description of the functions and responsibilities of the

battalion level staff, specifically the XO. The maneuver battalion reflects an economy of scale reflection of the division and the corps staff.

The battalion XO was the battalion chief of staff during World War I. The SOFM 101-5 addressed the chief of staff and XO together -"chief of staff (or executive in brigade and lower units)."<sup>8</sup> The general guidance in 1928 was:

The chief of staff, or executive is the principal assistant and advisor of the commander. He transmits the will of the commander to those who execute it and is the principal coordinating agency which insures the efficient functioning of the staff and of all troops of the command.<sup>9</sup>

The duty location for the XO, in 1928, was the Command Post (CP) by nature of the duties prescribed. "In brigade and lower units, it is usually not necessary for each (staff) section to keep a separate situation map, but the data from each section are entered on one map usually kept under the supervision of the unit executive."<sup>10</sup> The XO supervised the staff in all phases of operations as the "central pivot of all operations."<sup>11</sup>

Guidance on the XO in the 1928 manual did not change in the 1932 edition of the SOFM. The intent did not change in the 1940 manual either, but the list of duties lengthened. "He was the principal coordinating agency of the command."<sup>12</sup> The command and control or cybernetic

function of the XO was crucial to maneuver battalions through World War II.

The Armor and Infantry manuals through World War II are generally consistent with the SOFM 101-5. The XO performs as a chief of staff and 2IC. His duty location "usually remains at the command post."<sup>13</sup> The SOFM strongly links the XO to the chief of staff with an addition that, in many lower units, the XO also serves as 2IC (also in 1928 duties). The SOFM set the duties and responsibilities for the XO which the Armor and Infantry schools did not significantly augment through the post World War II time period.

A noted difference between the SOFM and the 1940 FM 7-5, Infantry Battalion Manual, was the emphasis on the 2IC. The Infantry manual stated the XO "acts as second-in-command of the battalion and as principal assistance of the battalion commander on matters relating to tactical operations."<sup>14</sup> This differed from the SOFM approach where the XO was primarily chief of staff and concurrently the 2IC. Notably, the XO and S-3 were the same person in the Infantry battalion of 1940. This emphasis on 2IC is important because the Infantry School shifted the duties and responsibilities from a staff to a command orientation with its 2IC approach. The concept of a chief of staff faded compared to the 2IC in the

Infantry battalion of 1940. This approach moved back in line with the SOFM by 1944.

The SOFM of 1950 brought further clarification in XO duties. There was no dramatic shift from previous manuals, just reinforcement and extension of responsibilities. The areas of SOFM clarification were chief of staff functions such as:

- "he directs and coordinates the staff to achieve unity of action. He may transmit the decisions of the commander to appropriate staff officers for preparation of the necessary orders, or he may transmit the decisions in the form of orders directly to those who execute them"<sup>15</sup>
- "the coordination of the activities of the staff is the primary responsibility"<sup>16</sup>
- "the war room is the responsibility of the chief of staff (XO)"<sup>17</sup>

The most revealing responsibility in the 1950 manual concerns staff training both at the individual and staff level. The commander and XO share responsibility for "individual training of the members of the staff."<sup>18</sup> Complete training as a functional team was specifically the responsibility of the chief of staff (XO).

The chief of staff is charged with the training of the staff as a team. Development of the team will be facilitated by conducting all staff activities, in peace time and during training in the manner described in the manual for combat situations. In addition, the chief

of staff furthers the training of the staff through the medium of map exercises, command post exercises, and map maneuvers.<sup>19</sup>

What had been an implied mission of the XO became a specified mission in 1950. The XO was responsible for the training of the staff. This was an important responsibility which needed constant effort and attention. Individual and collective staff training was the achilles heel of many units. One may assume the effect of the post World War II reduction, in Army structure and resources, contributed to staff training as a major weakness.

The 1950 Infantry Battalion manual, FM 7-10, did not refer to SOFM 101-5 for XO duties and responsibilities. FM 7-10 covered the XO but did not differentiate between the chief of staff and 2IC labels. The tone reflected the past and current SOFM manuals. The 2IC mission was a logical follow-on to the chief of staff function.

The executive officer, the principal assistant and advisor to the battalion commander, coordinates and supervises the details of operations and administration, thereby enabling the commander to devote himself to the broader aspects of command. The primary function of the executive officer is the direction and coordination of the battalion staff. He announces procedures for action within the staff.... The executive officer keeps himself abreast of the situation and future plans. During his commander's temporary absence, the XO represents him and directs action in accordance with the commander's policies. He is prepared to assume command at any time. He sees required reports are forwarded at the proper time, and that plans are prepared for future contingencies. He is responsible that

the staff is organized and working as a team to provide maximum assistance to the commander and the battalion as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

The 1960 SOFM continues the consistency of the XO role from the previous years. The XO "directs, supervises and integrates the work of the staff."<sup>21</sup> A subtle point but integration requires more than coordination. Active participation by the XO was mandated to mold the staff together into a single, smoothly-operating system. The XO role enlarged and the complexity of duties grew. The list of responsibilities went from ten in 1928 but by 1960 it expanded to 14 with a number of sub paragraphs. The chief of staff role was primary. "He exercises overall direction of the entire staff to include the staff he represents in the Tactical Operations Center (TOC)."<sup>22</sup>

The area of interest in the 1960 SOFM was the optional duty of 2IC. The XO was not automatically the 2IC. "The unit executive officer, performs in general the functions of chief of staff. In addition he may be the second in command."<sup>23</sup> He was the chief of staff but command prerogative determined 2IC. This was the first separation from the previously concurrent missions at battalion level of both chief of staff and 2IC.

The 1960s found Armor doctrine adjusting the XO linkage with the SOFM. The October 1966 FM 17-1, Armor Operations, contained additional XO duties of "unit

information officer and materiel readiness officer."<sup>24</sup>

Armor XO guidance was a compressed version of the SOFM for battalion and brigade.

(1) The executive officer is the principal assistant and adviser to the commander. His functions and responsibilities are similar to those of a chief of staff. He supervises the staff, and represents and acts for the commander during the temporary absence of the latter when directed to do so. He normally is the materiel readiness officer. As required, he assigns tasks to the members of the staff in addition to their primary duties. He is prepared to assume command at any time.

(2) The executive officer is responsible for the overall functioning of the command post. He is assisted by the headquarters commandant. He and the commander should not be absent from the command post at the same time.

(3) The executive officer establishes and supervises liaison with adjacent, higher, subordinate, and supporting units.<sup>25</sup>

The Armor changes were important in two areas.

First, the XO was now responsible for maintenance. This initiative started a move towards major supervisory responsibility in the Combat Service Support (CSS) area. Second, the succession of command question was addressed without specifying the XO as the 2IC. "He is prepared to assume command at any time"<sup>26</sup> reinforcing the discussion point in the manual:

...each commander must train and use his subordinates so that a smooth and efficient transition of command is insured. With few exception[s], succession of command should be rested in the next senior in rank.... The designation of authority is a function of



command. This is especially important during periods of combat when contact with the commander is temporally lost."<sup>27</sup>

The 1968 SOFM reduced the laundry list of chief of staff/XO functions. One clarification was on the XO location during combat. The manual stated the XO exercises overall direction of the staff representatives in the TOC.<sup>28</sup> The XO was the chief of staff who functioned as the coordinator and supervisor of the staff whether it was garrison or field, peace or combat.

The December 1969 FM 7-20, The Infantry Battalions, used a compressed interpretation of the SOFM regarding the XO. The 2IC priority resurfaced and the chief of staff name disappeared. If you were not familiar with the SOFM you would not know the XO was related to the chief of staff since the Infantry manual used 2IC in lieu of chief of staff. The XO "is second in command and the principal assistant to the battalion commander."<sup>29</sup> The statement was virtually identical to the 1940 manual. The description continued with a repeat of SOFM chief of staff duties but only if you were aware of what were normally chief of staff responsibilities. This manual made the 2IC role the staff supervisor. His "primary function is direction and coordination of the unit staff."<sup>30</sup> This took the 2IC from a "be prepared" mission while acting as chief of staff to a dominant role. The

Infantry School specified command succession versus the more indirect Armor approach.

The combat location of the XO was the CP in the late 1960s. This was consistent with previous doctrinal manuals. Review of the section on CP displacement surfaces the XO location because "As the command group moves...the remainder of the command continues operating in the old location under control of the executive officer."<sup>31</sup>

The end of the 1960's reflects a fairly consistent approach to XO duties from the 1920s. Doctrinal manuals usually designated the XO as 2IC. He acted as the chief of staff with the responsibility for TOC supervision. He was the center of battalion coordination and he was the principal advisor to the commander. The Armor School incorporated the materiel readiness officer as a significant duty. The Infantry emphasized the XO as 2IC versus the chief of staff without adjusting actual duties or responsibilities. The name "chief of staff" disappeared and reappeared from the Infantry manual periodically. Both branch schools shifted SOFM chief of staff functions laying the groundwork for a complex future.

### III. THE 1970s -- CHANGE IN XO ORIENTATION

The U.S. Army was recovering from Vietnam and working to establish a conventional warfare orientation by the mid 1970s. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War sensitized the U.S. to the modern destructive power of armor and anti-tank missiles. These two factors combined to generate the "Active Defense" doctrine with a European focus. Mechanized Infantry and Armor doctrine were rewritten but basic staff procedures remained the same through 1976. The 19 July 1972 FM 101-5 did not make adjustments to XO duties and responsibilities. The XO was the chief of staff with the primary duty of staff supervision and coordination.

Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) worked furiously in 1977 and staffed numerous changes. The final approved draft of FM 101-5 had a new title, Command and Control of Combat Operations, and a new focus -- Command and Control (C<sup>2</sup>). Seven operating systems provided the framework for the new staff manual. The XO role in CSS reached FM 101-5 from the Armor initiatives of the 1960s. C<sup>2</sup> was the priority and the XO became an economy of force element in CSS to allow the commander to concentrate on C<sup>2</sup> and the other operating systems.

The XO relationship to the chief of staff was not clear in FM 101-5 Final Draft (FD). In fact, a number of confusing issues arose. The organizational diagram for a

lower unit staff showed the XO in the equivalent location of chief of staff with text stating "staff functions of the smaller unit staff are generally the same as those for higher staffs.... However, the operational nature of smaller units missions requires some modification."<sup>32</sup> While not significant in itself, the supporting specifics of XO responsibilities were different from previous editions. For the first time in the Army's basic staff manual, the XO was not specifically identified in words as the battalion chief of staff though by implication the relationship was there.

The 2IC question was confusing in the 1977 FM 101-5 (FD) because command succession was identified under "deputy commander." "The officer designated as second in command must always be prepared to take over direction of the battle."<sup>33</sup> The phrasing and location in the manual made it appear the 2IC was not the chief of staff at battalion level. Furthermore, the 2IC relationship to the Assistant Division Commander (ADC) was enhanced as "they (ADCs) are to be considered the principal advisors to the commander."<sup>34</sup> Previously the XO received the 2IC mission as a concurrent portion of the chief of staff function or as a specified mission in Infantry battalions with duties similar to a chief of staff. Confusion over the XO responsibilities existed because a deputy commander had no inherent staff responsibilities. He was

prepared to take command and only did specific duties assigned by the commander. The 2IC in this light was not a staff supervisor though he could direct action. This issue remained unclear as doctrine evolved.

The XO location in combat was not the same as the chief of staff in FM 101-5 (FD). A chief of staff controls the TOC while the XO "divides his time normally between the Command Post (CP) and trains area. However, as the 2IC, he must be [intimately] familiar with the battle situation in the event he has to assume command."<sup>35</sup> The previous sentences are the only clear description of XO duties in FM 101-5 (FD). The XO is 2IC and spends an equal amount of time in the trains and the TOC. Notably, he is not responsible for the TOC. The TOC only provides a location for him to insure readiness for his 2IC function as a command replacement.

The XO did not control the TOC but supervised CSS from there or in the trains. The Commander's Interface with Functional Systems (Appendix 1) in FM 101-5 (FD) does not include the XO. If you assume the XO must be in the TOC for C<sup>2</sup>, what is he doing in the trains? Split between trains and TOC he cannot influence C<sup>2</sup> as a chief of staff effectively or be in proper position to take over as 2IC. The distance from the trains forward made the 2IC role difficult even if he was current on the battalion situation. Immediate reaction was a major

consideration for effective C<sup>2</sup> at battalion level. Doctrine was hazy at best for the XO during this period.

The publication of FM 71-2, The Tank and Mechanized Infantry Task Force, in 1977, confirmed the change in XO orientation. Where the XO was absent from view in FM 101-5 (FD) he was now clearly the CSS supervisor in FM 71-2's Commander's Interface with his Operating Systems (Appendix 2). "The battalion commander often relies on his executive officer to coordinate and supervise Task Force (TF) Combat Service Support (CSS)."<sup>36</sup> The XO role as chief of staff was gone even as "lack of time for detailed planning places increased emphasis on efficient staff work to insure continuous operations."<sup>37</sup> The portion of the manual on staff functions did not mention the XO. In fact, the Command Sergeant Major was covered but the XO was conspicuous by his absence.

The XO in the 1977 FM 71-2 had no specified area of responsibility other than CSS. The S-3 replaced the XO in coordination and control of the TOC and with all operating systems but CSS. The criticality of logistics in heavy operations attracted the full attention of the battalion XO. The priority for the XO was keeping the battalion combat capable by making CSS support the tactical plan.

The "XO's in the trains" became a well known expression by 1979. Even though "allowed in the TOC,"

the XO appeared to have no role forward in the late 1970s. The distinct separation of the majors in the battalion superficially resolved interaction between the S-3 and the XO. The predicament of who does what between the battalion's two majors was cleaner with the operations officer handling operations and the XO handling support. The question of "turf" was resolved, location of each was resolved, and both had plenty to do. Notably, the period of mid to late 1970s was when XOs and battalion commanders from 1980 to the present obtained the largest portion of their battalion level experience.

Application of FM 71-2's XO role in the field showed an unprepared XO when the commander needed to be replaced during training exercises. The XO was not current on the tactical situation and many times he was too far to the rear to influence the battle even if he was current. The ripple effect of training and experience brought this issue into the 1980s. The XO was a shadow during the 1970s. He was a critical individual in garrison but of little importance in the field except for CSS. Even the Battalions Commander's Handbooks of 1977 and 1980 mentioned the XO only in reference to peacetime/support roles regarding staff training and supervision. The XO insured support and the S-3 trained the TOC.<sup>38</sup>

The Division Restructure Evaluation (DRE) and Division 86 (DIV 86) studies provided the test for the

maneuver battalion reorganization into J-series TOEs. The number of line companies in a maneuver battalion increased. The responsibilities of a line company commander shrank regarding Combat Support (CS) and CSS. The speed and combat power of maneuver units in both organization and equipment increased. The TRADOC Pamphlet 525-4, Operational Concept for Heavy Division Operations, reflected the initial signs of the XO moving from only a CSS role to C<sup>2</sup> at the TOC. Once the command group departs, "The remainder of the battalion staff, under the control of the battalion executive officer, operates from the battalion TOC; the personnel and logistics officer and their staff elements normally from the battalion trains."<sup>39</sup> This shift foretold the return of the XO to the TOC during operations, not as a visitor but as a supervisor. The change of both location and orientation of the XO had no further explanation in the operational concept. Doctrinal manuals for the battalions required development and publication. This change required time to write and coordinate the new XO orientation. The 1970s ended with the XO in a confusing predicament.

#### IV. THE 1980s -- NTC: "BATTLE CAPTAIN"/"2IC"

The early 1980s did not see new approved doctrinal publications in the field at battalion level. The old "How to Fight" manual, (FM 71-2), was used until FM 71-



2J, The Tank and Mechanized Infantry Battalion Task Force, superceded it as a coordinating draft in December 1984. Drafts of FM 71-2 and FM 17-17 were circulated in 1982 and 1983 respectively but they did not circulate widely nor did they supercede FM 71-2 (1977). The Army focused on the implications and challenges of J-series TOE transition and the tremendous modernization of equipment. The XO still oriented rearward and the inherent adjustments of J-series, Abrams tanks, and Bradley fighting vehicles made CSS a critical challenge for the maneuver battalion.

The CSS orientation of the XO was compounded by the J-series organization. The size of the new headquarters company was over one third of the maneuver battalion. Originally intended to be commanded by a major, the Army finalized requirements documents with a captain. The field worked around this issue by using experienced "second command" captains combined with active XO attention from battalion. The XO spent time supervising and coordinating battalion CSS issues.

The XO was crucial to supporting the battalion from the CSS perspective in garrison and the field. This conflicted with the DIV 86 concept for the XO as far as C<sup>2</sup> and the TOC were concerned but written doctrine was not available in the early 1980s. Most officers had never seen, much less read, the DIV 86 operational

concept. Maneuver battalions used whatever assets were available to make the battalion function. In most units, the XO/2IC handled CSS in the field.

Task Force (TF) level training was an Army priority. The Army created the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin to train task forces. The initial lessons learned at NTC in 1982 and 1983 revealed alot about C<sup>2</sup>, TOC operations, and a multitude of issues broken down into the seven (7) operating systems (C<sup>3</sup>, Maneuver, Mobility/Counter mobility, Intelligence, Fire Support, Air Defense Artillery, and CSS). These systems discussed during the late 1970s in FM 101-5 (FD) became the framework for analysis at NTC. After Action Reviews (AARs), Combined Arms Training Activity (CATA) Training Tips, and NTC lessons learned from 1982 - 1984 were virtually void of reference to the battalion XO.<sup>40</sup> The coordinating staff, special staff, and the commander received comment after comment but the XO was conspicuously absent. It was as if he did not exist. Innumerable challenges surfaced about TF operations, but where and what the XO did to influence operations did not attract attention. For example, the 4 September 1984 Combined Arms Center (CAC) Training Tips was dedicated to C<sup>2</sup> of Combined Arms Operations at battalion level with over four pages on guidance and details. The XO is not mentioned. You would not know he exists much less has

any responsibility in the command and control system at battalion level.

The XO was back in the chief of staff role in the May 1984 FM 101-5. "He performs the same functions as those of a chief of staff."<sup>41</sup> The old SOFM tasks were back from staff supervision to control of the TOC. The only issue not directly covered was inherent assumption of the 2IC mission.

The December 1984 coordinating draft of FM 71-2J revised the principal duties of the XO. The 2IC was a priority again. The phased weighing of responsibilities was broken out into preparation, planning, conducting, and recovery from battle:

The executive officer is second in command and the principal assistant to the battalion task force commander. His primary function is direction and coordination of the staff. He transmits the Task Force commander's decision to staff sections and, in the name of the task force commander, to subordinate units when applicable. The executive officer keeps abreast of the situation and future plans, and, during the commander's absence, represents him and directs action in accordance with established policy. He is prepared to assume command at any time. During preparation, planning, and recovery phases he is normally deeply involved in coordinating CSS. During the battle, the executive officer is normally located in the TOC, following conduct of the battle, reporting to higher headquarters, keeping abreast of the situation at higher headquarters and on the flanks, integrating CS and CSS into the overall plan, planning for future operations, and being immediately ready to take command of the TF.<sup>42</sup>

The balancing act of how to conduct direction and coordination of the staff during all phases of a battle while accomplishing the CSS responsibilities was not confronted. In fact, verbal description of the TOC's duties sounded virtually like XO functions:

- a. The task force TOC is the command, control, and communications center for combat operations.
- b. The functions of the TOC when the command group is deployed are to monitor and assist in the command and control of current operations by integrating CS and CSS into ongoing operations, maintaining contact with the situation at higher and adjacent units, continuously updating the enemy situation, reporting to higher headquarters and planning future operations.<sup>43</sup>

The XO was back into C<sup>2</sup> of the battalion; however, FM 71-2J, retained S-3 responsibility to "supervise TOC operations."<sup>44</sup> An apparent conflict of duties and responsibilities between majors, which precedent resolved previously with the "bilateral staff"<sup>45</sup> orientation of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Lack of application of FM 71-2J attracted interest in the XO at NTC by early 1985. Most units had him supervising logistics in the rear, not in the TOC. The field was applying the old FM 71-2, and implementation of FM 71-2J was not widespread. "New" doctrine was not being used and units had major C<sup>2</sup>, synchronization, and coordination problems during conduct of the NTC battle. Battalions had CSS problems but attention focused on the other operating systems. The experience of battalion

commanders and XOs was largely from the 1970s and with H-series units. The primary use of the XO institutionalized in the field was as the supervisor of CSS.

NTC validated the fighting XO at company level and units used it eagerly. It rippled upward to battalion level but NTC shows "the fighting XO concept is almost impossible to execute at battalion level. It requires an individual who can push logistics for twenty hours per day, and grab an overlay and step on to the battlefield for the other four hours. Even the most talented XOs cannot sustain the load."<sup>46</sup> Units showed different looks but by late 1985 more units were keeping the XO in the TOC during the battle. His presence improved C<sup>2</sup> but when the XO became immersed in operational systems, logistics suffered.<sup>47</sup> Shortfalls in the battalion staff were increasingly evident when the XO was not in the TOC. In essence, FM 71-2J made the XO a fireman for the commander. He resolved problems anywhere in the TF. TOC operations went well as long as the XO was in the TOC. When the XO went forward to assume command, and was not in the TOC, the TOC was not as effective.<sup>48</sup> Successful C<sup>2</sup> for a battalion became identified with the XO in the TOC.

In 1985 the division commander of 4th Infantry Division stated after a NTC iteration, "the fighting XO

needs to be relooked. At the battalion level in the area of Logistics (LOG) support the margin of error is virtually zero. The dynamic, fast moving mechanized battlefield and its concomitant and ever changing logistics situation demand a field grade officer's full time attention."<sup>49</sup> This perspective from NTC was not uncommon. The question was what needs to be the priority and why? The issue of one man doing too much was indirectly the subject. The perspective was basically CSS versus TOC C<sup>2</sup>. The Infantry School's Field Circular (FC) 7-5, Operations Handbook, discussed XO staff supervision but "the XO's duties, in the final analysis, are based on the desires of the commander. Normally, they include materiel readiness and logistics."<sup>50</sup> The XO issue remained wide open with a heavy CSS orientation.

The Opposing Forces (OPFOR) experience at NTC filtered into public awareness in a Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) newsletter in 1985 based on a 1984 trip report by LTC James Crowley:

a. The OPFOR has used the XO as a deputy commander in the battalion TOC during the execution phase of the battle. Their TOC has a far more active role in directing and executing the battle than most rotational unit TOCs do or as outlined by FM 71-2. Functions include: Translating guidance from the commander during the battle to specific orders/tasking to subordinate/supporting units/systems. Coordination and execution of combat support into the battle. Monitor the nets of subordinate units in the critical area of the battlefield to ensure commander and other subordinate units are fully abreast of

situation. Assisting the commander control the task forces. Control the task force if when commander out of contact. Feeding information recommendations and help to the task force commander...."

b. The placement of the XO in the TOC during the battle allowed the TOC to perform this expanded control role. However 90-95% of XOs time was involved in CSS planning and execution. During non-battle time his primary function was CSS. During the battle he still coordinated CSS.<sup>51</sup>

The issue of C<sup>2</sup> had an extremely high priority. BG Leland addressed the 2IC concept from a C<sup>2</sup> perspective in his Commander's Memorandum:

The second in command (2IC) concept works well. A key is recognizing that the duties of company and battalion executive officers vary significantly with the phase of the operation - preparing, conducting, recovering. During the actual conduct of the battle, the company XO is forward in a combat vehicle at a location separate from the commander helping pass information to higher and adjacent units, and the battalion XO is supervising the critically important functions of the task force TOC. Both are then in a position to take command if needed. During the other phases, they facilitate CSS operations and planning from whatever locations that function can best be accomplished.<sup>52</sup>

The hard issues were how to do all that since CSS required continuous supervision. The XO had multiple missions, all important. How to do them successfully was still unclear. The concern with C<sup>2</sup> would see more detail in an Infantry and Armor school field circular on brigade and battalion C<sup>2</sup>. The pendulum on XO responsibilities swung back to C<sup>2</sup> with him as the 2IC in 1986.

A number of articles in professional journals were published to enlarge the branch school's positions on the XO. The identification of what general missions were required for the XO/2IC was in the doctrine but how to accomplish these tasks was absent. Officers with field experience from Europe and NTC published articles to say "how we did it."

The key role of the TOC surfaced with the XO in charge. Now the questions became which way does he orient himself, and was he active or passive? The 2IC concept itself had several views -- first, "to be successful he can't be a chief of staff;"<sup>53</sup> second, he must eavesdrop on the close battle while synchronizing CS, CSS, higher assets, and future operations; third, he must be the battle captain in the TOC to coordinate and control all phases of the battle. A self-fulfilling prophecy resulted because no consistent in-depth look at the XO/2IC existed. Most rotation AARs and observations at NTC did not reflect a concentrated look at the XO. Quite frankly XOs evaded/avoided or were just afforded the opportunity to miss close scrutiny and comment. Detailed lessons on the XO from repetitive iterations do not exist. He was a shadow who surfaced if/when he attracted attention or if ex post facto analysis of battalion problems caused the XO to come into the picture.



One focused rotation at NTC concentrated on C<sup>2</sup> during FY 86. The XO/2IC was deemed the critical cog in C<sup>2</sup> of the TF (Appendix 3). This view was a much different picture from the 1970s. The XO was critical. The analysis of many TF challenges in several operational systems missed a critical linkage point -- the XO. If the Commander/XO had not insured battalion staff preparation for NTC and the XO's role was not known, understood, and practiced, the TF was not prepared for continuous operations.

The C<sup>2</sup> focused rotation results say "the primary function of the 2IC is his role as an information integrator. He must be able to integrate not only staff information but also staff functions."<sup>54</sup> He becomes the link that drives synchronization efforts of the entire battalion at the TOC. C<sup>2</sup> of the battalion requires "active participation of the XO"<sup>55</sup> from the TOC. The 2IC's focus must be on developing the overall battle and he cannot afford to concentrate totally on the developments of any one particular staff element. An issue paper from the focused rotation explained the predicament:

The mixture of simultaneous and complex responsibilities requires the XO to balance and adjust his emphasis throughout an operation. Conflicting priorities raises a question which is answered based on the orientation the XO is focused on solving. FC 71-6 delineates the role of the XO as the 2IC in an explicit manner. Observation of TOC operations at the

NTC and other complex exercises has validated the 2IC concept, however, in practice, units appear to have varying degrees of success with its actual implementation. One recurring problem is that the 2IC is frequently out of the TOC for the purpose of "coordinating and supervising CSS planning and execution for operations" [para 2-6a (2)(a) from Errata Sheet, FC 71-6]. It has been observed that the 2IC has frantically worked at coordinating CSS during intervals between operations while the next operations order is being prepared. Paragraph 2-6c (2)(b) states "although the 2IC is normally in the TOC during combat, he must remain free to move if his direct involvement is required at another location," however, the outcome of this movement could often be that the 2IC has solved some logistical problem at the expense of his involvement in the operations planning or execution. Both he and the Commander must carefully examine the "cost" of the 2IC leaving the TOC in terms of what can be accomplished as opposed to what coordination will be lost in his absence.<sup>56</sup>

The complexity of the 2IC role and the apparent contradictory nature of key functions surfaced but was not adequately addressed. The January 1988 final draft of FM 71-2 clarified the role of the XO. His duties remained the same as FM 71-2J but the priority of work now oriented on the chief of staff area.

The XO is the principal assistant to the battalion commander. He is the battalion "chief of staff" and he is second in command. He is the principal integrator of CSS in support of and directs action in accordance with established command policy and guidance. During the battle, he is normally in the main command post where he monitors the battle, reports to higher headquarters, keeps abreast of the situation at higher headquarters and units on the flanks, integrates CS and CSS into the overall plan for future operations. He is free to move to any point in the area of operations to accomplish his duties and responsibilities.<sup>57</sup>

There is not a conflict between chief of staff and 2IC duties because, similarly to SOFM handling of this issue, a chief of staff is the 2IC at battalion level. The complicating factor is the infusion of CSS responsibilities. XO functions during a battle are quite clear regarding C<sup>2</sup>. However, the problem is before and after the battle to include the transition from each phase as the XO moves in and out of the TOC. How the XO adequately prepares to supervise the TOC when he is performing actions not inherently related to battalion conduct of the close battle is open to discussion. The interface between CSS integration, overall TF operations and time-space management is not easily envisioned.

CSS requires constant attention and so does supervision of the C<sup>2</sup> system as a process. Time, timing, and space are real constraints which training can reduce through practice, organization, and improved efficiency. The question remains whether optimization of the XO is feasible to the standard necessary to handle these functions. This does not consider the fog and friction of combat and the impact it may have on the unit and the XO in particular.

A look at the "battle staff operations and synchronization"<sup>58</sup> was the purpose of another focused rotation in 1988. The executive summary did not mention the XO specifically but a number of issues related

directly to his chief of staff function. "Time management is critical to successful integration of the seven operating systems on the battlefield. Units are not backward planning their troop leading procedures and coming up with a time plan. Preparation actions are often initiated late."<sup>59</sup> There is a "lack of established standard operating procedures in training units. During early parts of most rotations much effort is required to establish working relationships and recognize the critical tasks and coordination actions that must be accomplished."<sup>60</sup> The XO is the central figure in battle staff actions. Concern is growing with C<sup>2</sup> "this is despite considerable unit train-up programs in these areas and a significant focus on leader and staff planning and coordination actions at service schools. It is quite possible that an underlying reason is that we are missing critical coordination procedures and tasks in our current knowledge base."<sup>61</sup> The working role of the XO may be the weakness in the knowledge base for synchronized operations.

## V. ANALYSIS

The XO role is evolving but is this evolution a quick fix, reinvention of doctrine or a new adaptation to AirLand Battle? I contend we are seeing a combination of all three, skewed somewhat by peacetime realities.

Doctrinal chief of staff responsibilities replicate what the XO is directed to do as 2IC. This reinvents "old" doctrine at the battalion level. Furthermore, the trigger for the quick fix doctrine of "2IC" was the C<sup>2</sup> problem created at battalion level by the removal of the XO from the TOC in the 1970s, and the erosion of his chief of staff duties. The quick fix for C<sup>2</sup> and a prepared XO for command is a "2IC" active during the battle to back up the commander. A functional chief of staff who trains his staff and works the TOC is a prepared 2IC.

The return to a chief of staff approach does not fully address the importance of CSS supervision. The complexity of modern equipment and the battalion's dependency on CSS has escalated from the 1960s. The capability of one individual to manage all functions is assumed but not validated. In fact, NTC results make it open to question.<sup>62</sup> Since the XO has not been evaluated thoroughly, the Army has been able to avoid the issues of XO doctrinal and structural shortfalls by dropping attention down to the staff itself. Better training of the staff was an initial solution. The training level of the battalion staff greatly impacts on a battalion. Numerous articles and studies on how to train the staff have been published in recent years. Notably, little has focused on how to train the XO so he can train and

execute with the staff. The causal linkage to the XO has been missed.

The speed and complexity of TF operations drove home a critical need for the battalion XO to be a chief of staff, CSS supervisor, and 2IC. AirLand Battle and Army of Excellence initiatives reduce redundancy and personnel while increasing the scope of unit and individual missions. Efficiency and competence are essential for battalion operations. The field grade officers in a battalion constitute the highest concentration of experience and their efforts must be mutually supporting. The youth and inexperience of battalion staff officers coupled with the speed of modern combat requires training to enable adaptation to combat operations. When has that not been the case at battalion level or for any staff? The point is staff training has always been an inherent requirement but the XO role in training was lost and may now be sufficiently complex to preclude the goal of synchronization. His role is not just to train the staff but also to train himself.

The conduct of training requires a sound doctrinal basis augmented with a comprehensive "how to" program for the trainer. Since the employment of the XO has been inconsistent in the last ten years, the knowledge of how the XO directs the battalion staff is confusing. The last 5 years at NTC show the gaping holes in the training

of field grade officers in TF operations and battalion staff execution. Focused rotations at NTC make this point. The unspoken question is, what if the problem is beyond training?

Battalion staff operations are direct reflections of the XO's and commander's abilities as leaders, trainers, and staff supervisors. If XO responsibilities in the field are not understood, fully developed, and rehearsed, both the XO and the commander share a void in critical knowledge. Currently, knowledge is not easily obtainable and the formal school system presently available is of little assistance.

The nature of the XO role in combat operations is difficult to visualize. This predicament reflects in his lack of consistent visibility at NTC. This lack of visibility is compounded by what he really is expected to do from a doctrinal standpoint. Consequently, analysis is largely by conjecture based on the overall results or lack of action by personnel in the battalion that published doctrine pinpoints for the action. For example, if brigade was not kept updated - what was the XO doing to prod the S-1, S-2, Battalion Maintenance Officer (BMO), or S-3. This leaves the XO as a figure with no clear definition until after the fact.

The strain and tension of logistics versus operations is a reality of life for the XO. The

commander is forward, and the S-3 is forward. Someone must orchestrate the other pieces influencing close operations. The individual responsible for synchronization of the battalion's operational systems is the XO. This was past doctrine, but it was lost and is the primary mission again. The Army has moved dramatically forward by acknowledging the criticality of battlefield synchronization from the TOC. However, primary responsibility for CSS still has evolved for the XO while he works C<sup>2</sup>. This complication has three major missions on the XO's plate simultaneously:

1. Synchronize all operations
2. Manage CSS
3. Be prepared to assume command

How to do that during each phase of combat operations is a difficult matter to conceptualize much less articulate, in detail. Consequently, it has only been infrequently attempted by those who have experienced through trial and error just how complex and important the XO mission is to battalion operations. Doctrine is not clear and the attempts to clarify the XO's interface during battle supports the contention that the problem is deeper than just training. The battalion XO may have too many responsibilities to be effective.



## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The evolving role of the XO is a direct reflection of the experience gained from training exercises and training centers. Ironically, the shortfalls in battalion staff planning and execution during training is forcing the XO to conduct his historical duties as the battalion "chief of staff." The attempt to make 2IC override the chief of staff functions is visible in FC 71-6. The chief of staff duties outlined from the 1920s to the 1960's in the Staff Officers Field Manual mirror the description of 2IC in FC 71-6 and FM 71-2J. The new FM 71-2 reverts to the original SOFM approach with the addition of CSS responsibilities.

The term 2IC has always applied to the XO as a potential mission. The modern interpretation of "2IC" excites and stimulates officers more than "chief of staff." The implication is a "commander" versus "staff officer" advantage. Either way, a battalion needs an experienced integrator and coordinator in the TOC. This has been acknowledged since World War I. Our current Army rediscovers that fact using modern Infantry and Armor battalions. However, the name changed in some doctrinal publications to confuse the interaction of the XO as, chief of staff and 2IC.

The missing linkage in the XO equation is how to do all the missions now assigned? The modern criticality

and complexity of CSS is the largest complicating factor. The battalion staff is the most inexperienced of any staff with the requirement to conduct missions quickly and to plan, coordinate, and execute simultaneously. The evolutionary and changing nature of the XO substantiates the lack of focus on his role. This causes a lack of doctrinal, training, and practical continuity in the guidance for training and use of the XO in the field.

One of the Infantry School responses to an NTC observation on the XO's role was "there is no need to muddy the chain of command issue."<sup>63</sup> Ironically, whenever an infrequent look at the XO occurs, discussion is generated. Unfortunately, it does not result in a detailed analysis of his role. NTC does not adequately track the XO and his role. The XO surfaces through omission or through extremely, positive or negative, specific events. The hard work and synchronization of the battalion does not receive adequate attention from the XO perspective. The issues of staff execution at NTC were on the table for several years before the XO became part of the problem or a possible solution. Now the XO is at center stage for responsibility, but detailed guidance or "how to" is absent except for professional journal articles.

The reality is that field grade officers are not prepared to be XOs before assuming those duties.

Practical experience will always be invaluable, but the learning curve does not need to be as steep as current XO's experience. The arguments of personnel policies, time available, and the number of positions all contribute to the predicament. However, the bottom line is proper training and XO preparation is not accomplished. I contend this occurs because the XO is an inherently difficult role and the Army cannot decide how to deal with it. Consequently, generic descriptions and the caveat of "commander's decision" has been used to avoid addressing the XO in detail. The truth is the Army is still unsure on the XO; however, we desperately need a functional contribution from this major in a combat situation.

General Collins said in his book, Common Sense Training, "The officers suffered because they had not learned about the complex ramifications of their own profession. They were not learning about training, the mud and the night.... The results were beginning to show in the units."<sup>64</sup> NTC interactions and virtually every exercise and ARTEP reinforces the stark reality of that statement.

Battalions have to fight and win for the rest of the Army to be successful. C<sup>2</sup> is a critical element to a battalion's success; so is CSS. The XO's role deserves the analysis necessary to make a TF function effectively.

The quick fix has a place, but the Army's soldiers, the Army's battalions, and specifically the Army's majors deserve a clearer view.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The XO's role must come into sharper focus within the battalion. Attention and discussion on this subject must be generated throughout the Army. Brigade operations at NTC will diffuse concentration at TF level. This predicament is compounded because many of the Army's minds are currently straining for understanding of the operational level of war. Tactical concerns at battalion level are potentially mundane and lack widespread attention by field grade officers. The Army cannot afford a superficially or politically amenable look at the XO. Hard questions need to be asked and answered. The danger is a tactical Army incapable of the quality combat execution that is necessary for making battalion operations a success.

### Specific Recommendations.

a. The Combat Training Centers (CTCs) should consciously track and study the duties and responsibilities of the XO to establish an experience base. Rotations should have the Observer Controller (OC) dedicated to the XO report in depth on the XO's interface with the seven operating systems. The balance between XO

responsibilities and the relationships with the battalion commander and staff need to be collected and analyzed. Fundamentally, an objective determination of whether one man can handle the mission has to be done.

b. The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) should publish a newsletter on the XO. The synchronization role should be an area of specific attention concerning time and space factors impacting on the XO before, during, and after combat operations. The shift of thought and action between each phase needs review to identify transition requirements.

c. The Combined Arms Center (CAC) should task the Infantry and Armor schools to develop and publish more detail on the XO based on the FM 71-2 (FD).

d. The Command and General Staff College (CGSC) and the Pre-Command Course (PCC) should incorporate instruction on the doctrinal duties and responsibility of the XO during combat operations.

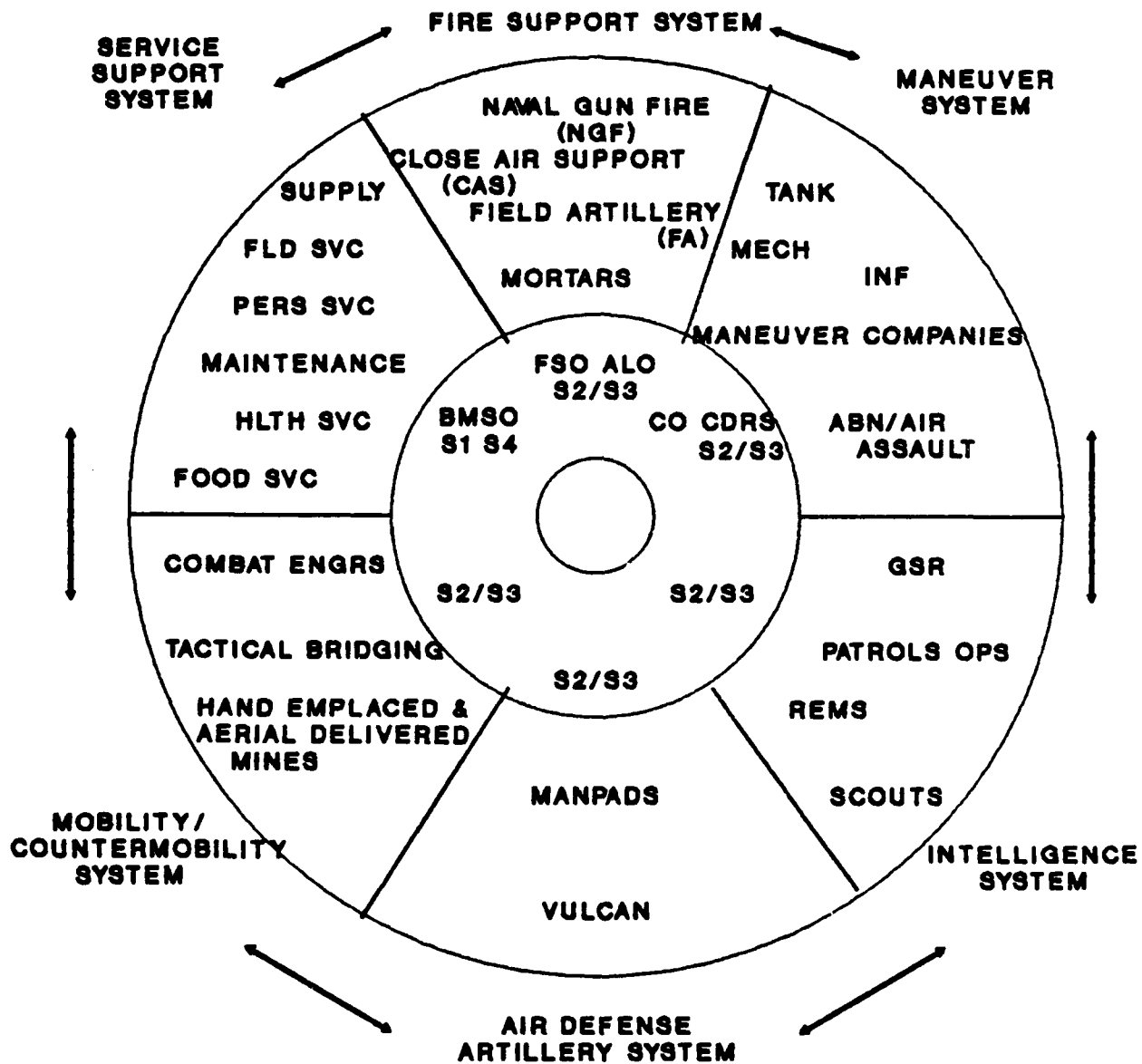
e. CGSC's Combat Studies Institute (CSI) should research the impact of the battalion XO in mid to high-intensity combat since World War II.

#### VIII. THE FUTURE

The Army concentrates on training. These effects are felt throughout the Army's school system and in combat units. The role of the XO is a specific area that has not kept up with the comparative attention given

other officers in maneuver battalions. The XO must come into sharper focus to insure full comprehension of battalion operations from the individual, staff, and unit perspective. The XO influences all the systems and assists the commander. Comprehension and consistency in what he does, how he does it, and from where he does it from will greatly assist the success of future battalions. The XO has to have real balance and timing to ensure overall combat effectiveness.<sup>65</sup> The details of how an XO obtains the balance and timing are questions only the future can answer.

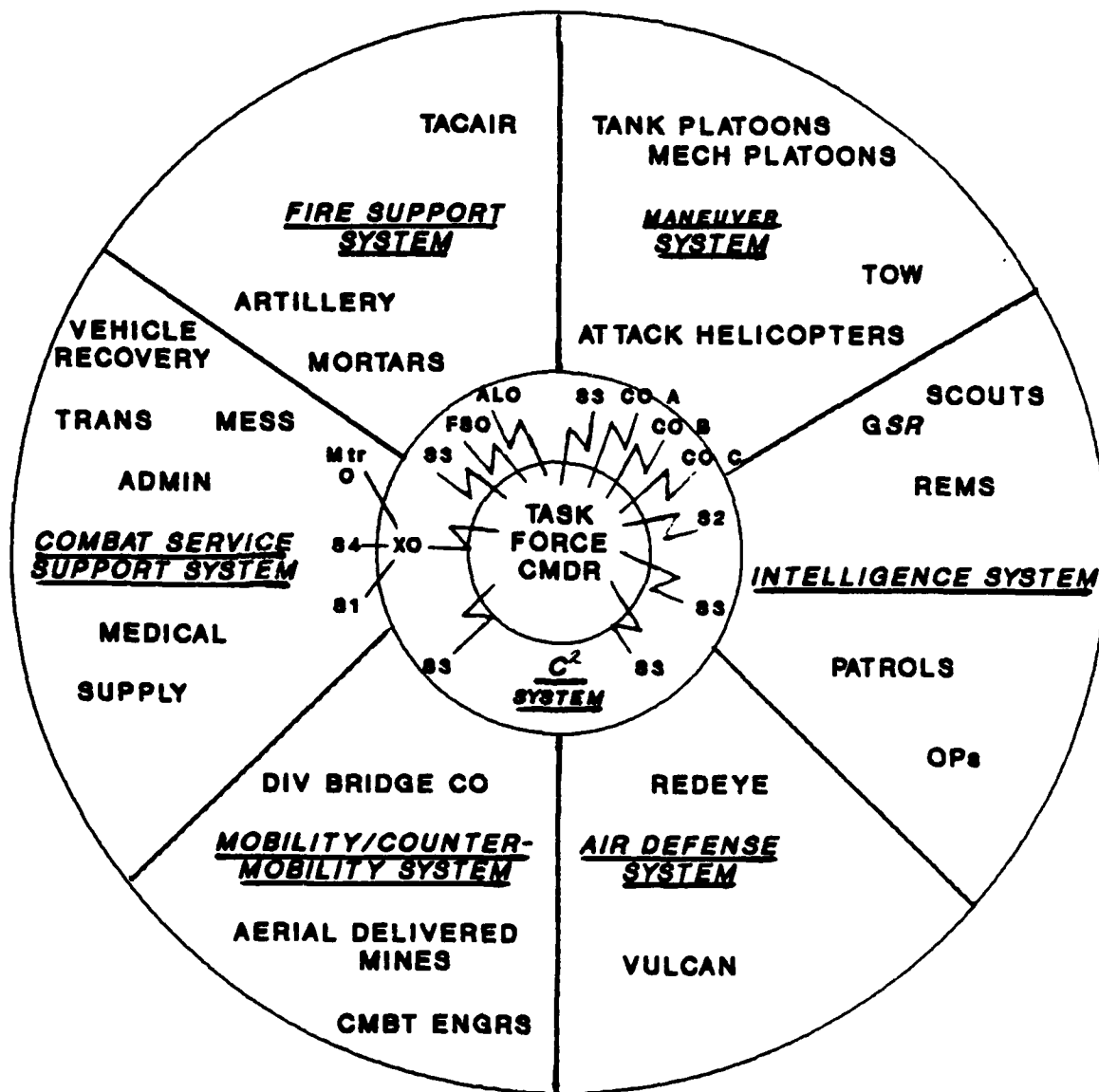
# A BATTALION COMMANDER'S INTERFACE WITH HIS FUNCTIONAL SYSTEMS



[NOTE XO ABSENCE]

(Figure 4-1 from FM 101-5 (FD) dated 1977)  
APPENDIX 1

# TASK FORCE COMMANDER'S INTERFACE WITH HIS OPERATING SYSTEMS



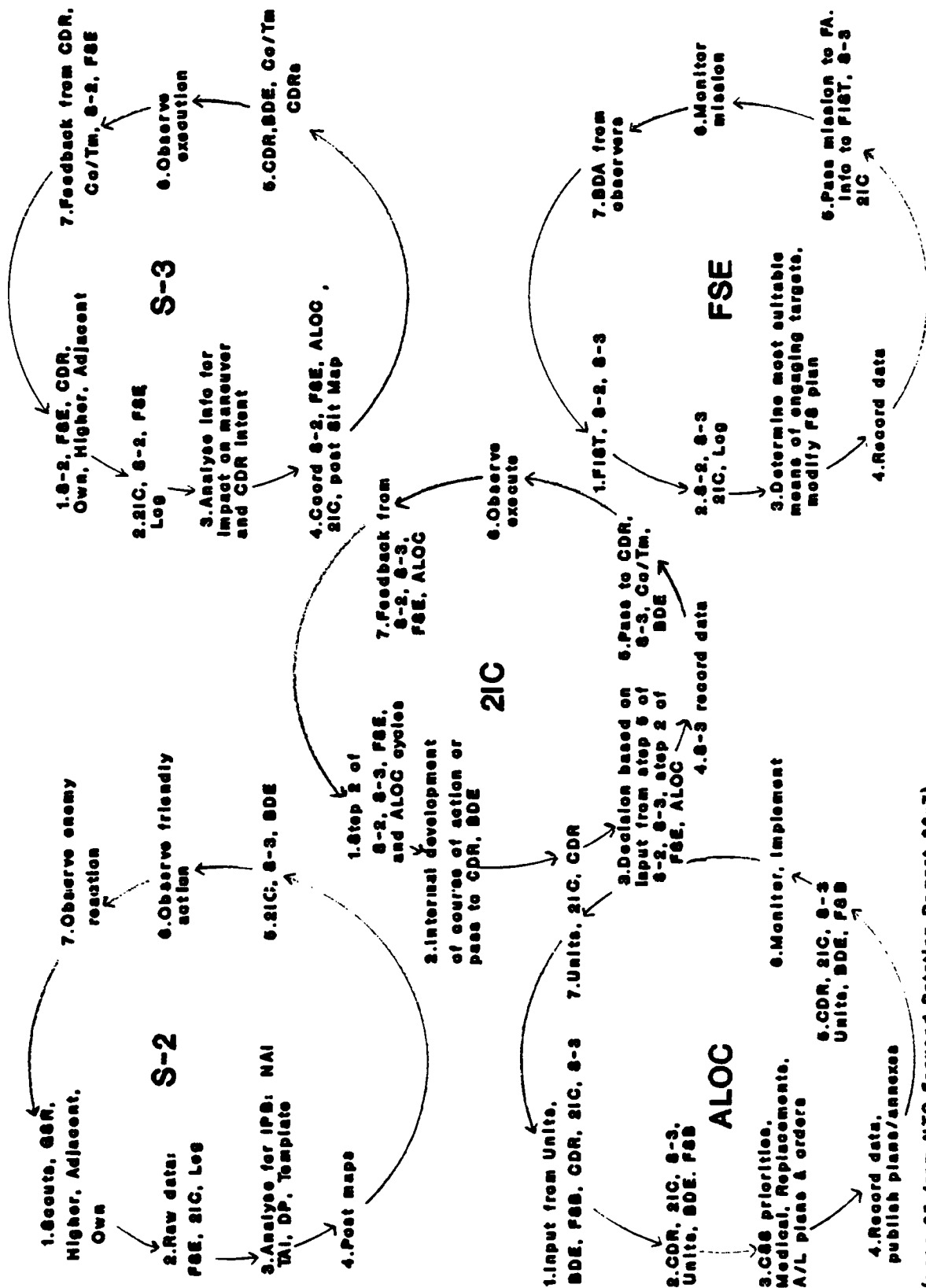
[NOTE XO INTERFACE]

(page 3-11 from FM 71-2 dated 1977)

APPENDIX 2



# COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE TF



(page 25 from NTC Focused Rotation Report 88-7)  
APPENDIX 3

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